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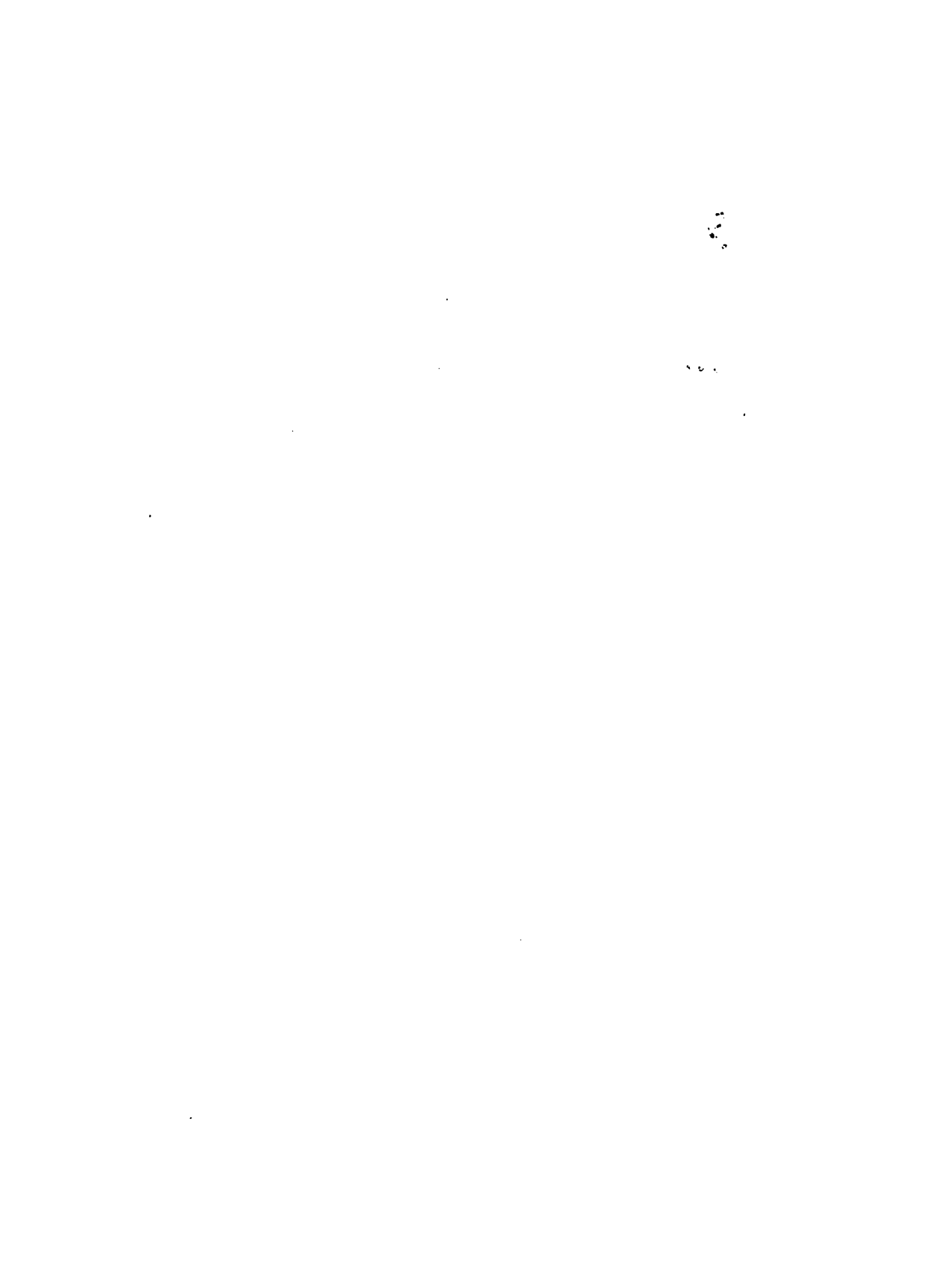






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## **FLASHLIGHTS**



# FLASHLIGHTS

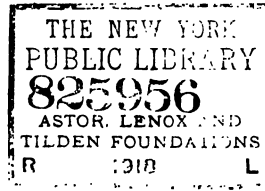
BY  
MARY ALDIS

AUTHOR OF  
"THE PRINCESS JACK"  
AND  
"PLAYS FOR SMALL STAGES"



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**I**  
**CITY SKETCHES**

*Go forth now, moods and metres,  
Sing your song and tell your story;  
You have companioned me  
Through hours grave and gay,  
What will you say  
To him whose curious hand  
Shall turn these pages?*

*Soon all my joy in setting forth  
My vagrant thoughts  
Shall pass  
Into the silence;  
Soon I shall be  
One with the mystery.*

*My book upon some quiet shelf  
Beneath your touch  
Shall wake, perhaps,  
And speak again  
My wonder, my delight,  
My questioning before the night—*

*And as you read  
Somewhere afar  
I shall be singing, singing.*

## *THE BARBER SHOP*

I SPEND my life in a warren of worried men.  
In and out and to and fro  
And up and down in electric elevators  
They rush about and speak each other,  
Hurrying on to finish the deal,  
Hurrying home to wash and eat and sleep,  
Hurrying to love a little maybe  
Between the dark and dawn  
Or cuddle a tired child  
Who blinks to see his father.

I hurry too but with a sense  
That Life is hurrying faster  
And will catch up with me.

Right in the middle of our furious activity  
Two soft-voiced barbers in a little room,  
White-tiled and fresh and smelling deliciously,  
Flourish their glittering tools  
And smile and barb  
And talk about the war and stocks and the Honolulu earth-  
quake  
With equal impartiality.

I like to go there.  
Time seems slow and patient  
While they tuck me up in white  
And hover over me.  
The room gives north and west and the sunset sky  
Lights the grey river to a ribbon of glory  
Where silhouetted tugs  
Like tooting beetles fuss about their smoky businesses;

Besides, in that high place  
No curious passer-by  
Can see my ignominious bald spot treated with a tonic,  
Nor can a lady stop and bow to me, my chin in lather,  
As happened once;  
So I go there often  
And even take a book.

There's another person all in white  
Who comes and goes and manicures your nails  
On application.  
One can read with one hand while she does the other.  
Because I feel that Life is hurrying me along  
With horrid haste  
Soon to desert me utterly,  
I used to take my Inferno in my pocket  
And reflect on what might happen  
Were I among the usurers.

One day a low-pitched voice broke in.  
I listened vaguely,

What was the woman saying?  
"Please listen for a moment, Mister Brown,  
I've done your nails for almost half a year;  
You've never looked at me."  
I looked at that,  
And sure enough the girl was young and round and sweet.  
She coloured as I turned to her  
And looked away.  
I waited silently, enjoying her confusion.  
The words had been shot out at me  
And now apparently she wished them back.  
"What do you want?" I said.  
Again a silence while she rubbed away.  
I opened my Inferno with an ironic glance  
Towards Paradiso waiting just beyond.  
"Well, rub away, my girl," I thought,  
"You opened up, go on."

The book provoked her.  
"I'm straight," she said.  
"I never talked like this before.  
The fellows that come round—  
Good Lord!  
Showin' me two pink ticket corners  
Stickin' out the pocket of their vest,  
'Say, kid,—tonight,—you know,'  
Thinkin' I'll tumble  
For a ticket to a show!  
They make me sick, they do,  
Boobs like that;

You're different. I want to know  
What's in that book you read.  
I want to hear you talk.  
Oh, Mister, I'm so lonesome!  
But I'm straight, I tell you.  
I read, too, every evening in my room,  
But I can't ever find  
The books you have.  
I expect you think I'm horrid  
To talk like this—but—  
I got some things by an Englishman  
From the Public Library.  
Say, they were queer!  
He thinks a woman has a right  
To say out if she likes a man;  
He thinks they do the looking  
Because they want—  
Oh, Mister, I'm so terribly ashamed  
I'll die when I get home,  
An' yet I had to speak—  
I'd be awful, awful good to you, if only,  
Please, please, don't think I'm like—  
Don't think I'm one o' them!  
Whatever you say, don't, don't think that!"

She stopped, and turned to hide her crying.  
I looked at her again,  
Looked at her young wet eyes,  
At her abashed bent head,

Looked at her sweet, deft hands  
Busy with mine . . .

But—  
Not for nothing  
Were my grandfather and four of my uncles  
Elders in the Sixth Presbyterian Church  
Situated on the Avenue.  
Oh not for nothing  
Was I led  
To squirm on those green rep seats  
One day in seven.

And now,  
The white-tiled, sweetly-smelling barber shop  
Is lost to me.  
What a pity!

### *LOVE IN THE LOOP*

THEY sat by the fountain at a table for two,  
The traditional couple—  
An awkward, ill-dressed girl,  
With a lovely skin and a country smile,  
And the man who was paying for her dinner.  
There they were—  
Exploiter and Exploited.

I could see only his back, clad in grey tweed.  
His neck rolled over his collar  
In a thick red fold,  
And his hands, which he waved about,  
Were fat and white with shiny nails  
And diamond rings.

I wondered if he was offering her better clothes  
For the girl looked troubled.  
Her shirt-waist wasn't fresh,  
Her skirt was dragged,  
And her feet, curled up under the chair,  
Shifted themselves uneasily, seeking cover  
For most lamentable shoes;  
But oh, her skin!

Soft rose and the delicate white of summer mist.  
Her hair was the brown of hazelnuts after a frost,  
Glinting to saffron as she turned her head  
Quickly from side to side  
Like an enquiring dove.

Soon oysters came;  
She eyed them with distrust,  
Then ate one thoughtfully and made a face.  
He seemed concerned  
And beckoned the waiter to remove the dish,  
Asking if she'd rather have a "country sausage."  
She showed her baby teeth in a happy smile  
And sausages were brought.  
She ate them all while he watched her enviously,  
Putting a little white pellet in some water  
For his second course.

Champagne was set before them and he filled her glass  
While he turned his bottom side up.  
She sipped, and made another face, and choked,  
Then tried again and laughed.  
"I do believe it's good," she said,  
And finished the glass,  
Holding it out for more.  
"You'd best look out," I heard him say  
As he slid his hand along the table-cloth.  
She cringed away.  
"Oh, please, please don't!" she said;  
But he hitched his chair softly around the table.

I watched it all,  
Wondering miserably if it was my duty  
To warn the girl,  
And whether she would prove clinging if I did.

Finally to secure her hands he turned himself.  
My God, what a mug!  
His beady eyes over his glistening cheeks  
Blinked like a hurrying pig's:  
His protuberent lips wiggled themselves  
In amorous expectancy  
While little beads of ecstasy bedewed his brow.  
I turned my chair around and raised my paper.

Suddenly I heard her cry, "Oh, Mister!  
That fuzzy stuff you made me drink—my head!"  
And she grabbed her coat and slithered along the floor  
To the front door, calling over her shoulder.  
"Don't come. I want some air,  
I'll be back in a minute or two."

After a startled forward step  
He settled back and called the waiter,  
Who hurried to busy himself expectantly  
With the inevitable reckoning.  
By the time it was ready, Mr. Amorous-One  
Was deep in the stock reports and dead to the world.  
The waiter stood on one foot and then on the other,  
Finally wandering off.

After some twenty minutes of troubled scrutiny  
The paper was laid down,  
And Mr. Amourous  
Looked at his watch and jumped,  
Then turned the bill and burrowed in his pocket,  
Pulling out change.  
Next came a leather wallet—  
And then what a bellowing rent the astonished air!

“Eight hundred dollars gone!” he yelled.  
“Hi! get that girl, I tell you, GET THAT GIRL!”  
But nobody stirred.  
Exploiter and Exploited—

### *CONVERSE*

THEY were two disembodied heads on bath cabinets,  
Just like "Une tête de femme" by Rodin, in a show,  
Save that each head was topped  
By a ruffled rubber cap,  
One rose-lined grey, one brown.  
They were two female heads,  
And yet they were not pretty,  
At least not then.

They fixed their level-fronting eyes on a sanitary wall  
In front of them  
And waited.  
The Bath Attendant turned a crank,  
Consulted a thermometer, and vanished.

Time dragged warmly by.

Finally one head heaved a heavy sigh and turned itself  
And looked at the other head,  
Which bit its lip and frowned.

Since names seem meaningless  
When souls converse,

Let us call these souls quite simply Grey and Brown.  
The one that heaved and turned itself was Brown;  
The one that bit its lip was Grey.

"Are you pretending that you didn't see me?"

Queried Brown.

"Oh no!" said Grey.

"I've been meaning to have a talk with you," said Brown.

"And why not now?"

"And why not now?" said Grey.

"You may as well understand," continued Brown,

"You've got to give him up."

"Him up?" said Grey.

"That's what I said," said Brown.

"You very well know

His duty is to me. I bear his name,

I've given him seven children and a step,

All likely boys.

He's very fond of them, you know."

"I know," said Grey.

"Well, what have you got to say?" Brown trembled on.

"Why don't you speak?"

Grey murmured softly,

"Isn't it hot in these?"

Brown looked at her and laughed.

"You're pretty cool," she said,

"But I'd like to tell you here and straight and now,  
I'm tired of nonsense,  
Tired of worrying.  
And very, very tired of him and you."  
"Of him and me," said Grey.

"I've cried and then I've laughed  
And said I didn't care,"  
Said whimpering Brown.  
"I've dressed myself up beautifully  
And then again I'd slump,"  
Said sniffing Brown.  
"But nothing mattered.  
If he came home bright and gay, of course I'd know  
He'd been with you,  
And if he came home different, then I'd know  
He wished he were,  
So gradually it didn't matter much  
Which way he was.  
And then I thought I'd try and keep  
The boys from knowing,  
So I'd make up lies and plan;  
With seven and the step  
It took considerable planning,  
But luckily the little ones don't notice.  
And now I've got you here, I'm going to have my say!"  
"Your say," said Grey.

"I'm going to get your promise here and now  
To give him up for good,

Do you understand?"

"For good," said Grey.

"Oh yes, I understand."

"Or else," and beetling Brown

Grew dark and terrible,

"You'll be the co-respondent in a suit!"

"A suit," said Grey.

"I said a suit," said Brown,

"I mean a suit.

Moreover, as you haven't said a word

I'll bring it soon."

"It soon," said Grey.

And then the Attendant came,

Looked at the clock and then the thermometer,

Got sheets and led them out.

"Unless—" said Brown.

"Oh yes, unless—" said Grey.

## *WINDOW-WISHING*

Oh yes, we get off regular  
By half past six,  
And six on Saturdays.  
Sister an' I go marketing on Saturday nights,  
Everything's down.  
Besides there's Sunday comin';  
You can sleep,  
Oh my, how you can sleep!  
No mother shakin' you  
To "get up now,"  
No coffee smell  
Hurryin' you while you dress,  
No Beauty Shop to get to on the tick of the minute  
Or pony up a fine.  
Sister an' I go window-wishin'  
Sunday afternoon, all over the Loop.  
It's lots of fun.  
First she'll choose what she thinks is the prettiest  
Then my turn comes.  
You mustn't ever choose a thing  
The other's lookin' at,  
And when a window's done  
The one that beats

Can choose the first time when we start the next.  
The hats are hardest  
'Specially when they're turnin' round and round.  
But window-wishin's great!

Then there's the pictures,  
Bully ones sometimes,  
Sometimes they're queer.  
Sister an' I go in 'most every Sunday.  
We took Mother 'long last week,  
But she didn't like 'em any too well.  
Mother's old, you know,  
We have to kinda humour her.  
Next day she couldn't remember a single thing  
But the lions on the steps.

You know what happened the other night?  
Sister and I didn't know just what to do,—  
A gentleman came to see us.  
He said Jim asked him to  
Sometime when he was near.  
Jim's my brother, you know.  
He lives down state.  
We have to send him part of our wages regular,  
Sister an' I;  
He doesn't seem to get a steady place,  
And Mother likes us to.  
She's dotty on Jim.  
Sometimes I get real nasty—  
A great big man like that!

Anyway his friend came walkin' in  
And said Jim sent his love.  
Sister an' I didn't exactly know what to do,  
And Mother looked so queer!  
Her dress was awful dirty.  
He said he was livin' in Chicago,  
And Sister said she hoped  
He had a place he liked.  
He only stayed a little while,  
Till half past eight,  
And then he took his hat  
From under the chair he was sittin' on  
And went away.  
I said just now it happened the other night,  
But it was seven weeks ago last Friday evening.  
He said he'd come again.  
I dunno as he will,  
Sister an' I keep wonderin'.  
We dressed up every night for quite a while  
And stayed in Sundays.  
Yesterday we thought  
We'd go down window-wishin'  
And what do you think?  
Just as she'd picked a lovely silver dress  
Sister jerked my arm,  
Then all of a sudden there she was  
Cryin' and sniffin' in her handkerchief  
Standin' there on the sidewalk,  
And what do you think she said?  
"I'd like to kill the woman that wears that gown!"

I tell you I was scared,  
She looked so queer,  
But she's all right today.  
Oh thank you, two o'clock next Saturday the tenth?  
I'll put it down,  
A shampoo and a wave, you said?  
I'll keep the time,  
Good-morning.

### *A LITTLE OLD WOMAN*

THERE'S a twinkling little old woman  
Brings me sandwiches after my Turkish bath.  
Her cheeks are brown and pink,  
And her eyes, behind her gold-bowed spectacles,  
Smile in a curious fashion as if to say  
"I know you're worried about that letter in the pocket of  
your dress,  
Hanging out there, but I'll take care of it."

She sets the tray down on a chair beside my couch  
And trots away to another languid lady in a sheet,  
And as I fall asleep she says to me  
"Don't worry honey, I'll take care of it."  
Perhaps it's only in my dreams she says it,  
But anyway she's there.

Once after she had hooked me up  
She raised her sober dress  
To show me that she too could wear a lace-trimmed petticoat;  
And a dainty thing it was, with tiny rosebuds  
Festooned all around.  
She dropped her skirt and laughed.  
"I've got one . . . too," she said.  
This was uncanny, so I said Good-day.

Next time I went I met him at the door  
With a market basket!  
It seems he brought the dainties every day  
She made up into sandwiches for us who lolled about.  
I took a look at him,—  
A delicate, chiselled face with soft blue eyes,  
Under his chin from ear to ear a fringe of yellow down,  
Around a bald spot, curls of whity-gold;  
He blinked a little as she gave him charges  
Then wandered thoughtfully away  
Clutching his basket.  
He wore a black frock coat too big for him,  
And on his head, a round black hat like a French Curé's.

So that was why she wore the petticoat  
And smiled so knowingly—  
But how she worked!  
I wouldn't work like that.  
Perhaps she kept that little thing for pleasuring.  
Well, this is a woman's world, why not,  
If so be that he pleased her?

The steamy, scented atmosphere that day  
Seemed teeming with intrigue;  
I looked at the strapping, bare-legged wench  
Who brought my sheet  
Enquiring mutely, "Have you got a lover?"  
And when a person next me roused herself  
To ask the time,  
I thought, "Ah-ha! He's waiting!"

It chanced when sandwiches were brought  
I found myself alone  
With her of the spectacles and petticoat.  
I wanted to go to sleep,  
But I wanted more to find out how  
She got a lover,  
And how she kept him.

After some skirmishing I asked straight out,  
"Was that your husband with the market basket?"  
"My husband's dead," she said, and grinned  
And took a chair beside my couch.  
"Who is he, then?" I said.  
"He's mine," she answered. "Mine!  
I paid for him five hundred dollars cool,  
And now he likes me!"

I sat up at that.  
"You paid for him?" I gulped.  
"Why yes, he lived up-stairs, you know.  
His heart is bad; he hadn't any cash;  
He got hauled up on a breach-of-promise suit;  
I paid it for him.  
Now he lives with me!"

She emphasized her "me" triumphantly.  
I looked her over.  
Certainly there was something there of vividness,  
Of quick vitality.  
He and his funny hat and goldy curls—

Well, anything may be.  
"Are you happy now?" I asked.  
She smiled and bridled.  
"The business pays," she said.  
"You ladies pay good prices for your food  
And then the tips besides.  
He gets the things for me and brings 'em fresh,  
Then what do you suppose he does the rest of the time?  
(His heart is bad, you know)  
Writes verses all day long for the Sunday papers;  
Mostly they don't get in,  
But every now and then he gets two dollars.  
I bought him an Underwood last week.  
He was so pleased,  
Only the punctuation isn't right.  
It isn't a second-hand; cost me a hundred and twenty-five;  
I saved it up—"

The bell rang and she rose.  
"Say! please don't tell them anything about—  
About—my husband."  
And she vanished.







## *DESIGN*

If all the world's a stage, why do we know  
Naught of the drama we the actors play?  
Are we but puppets, we who come and go  
Mumbling our parts through life's quick-passing day?

What if some master hand design the show  
Planning a spacious pattern cunningly!  
Time, color, drifting human shapes all go  
Into a great discordant harmony:

Let this one's part be cast in delicate grey,  
Let this a heavy purple shadow be,  
Here let there come one clear, cold, bluish ray  
And here— but hold! one actor suddenly

In desperate rebellion cries his part—  
A scarlet tumult from his own hot heart.

## ***THE WORLD CRY***

Joy, light, and love I crave  
And shall discover—  
Life's wild adventure opening to my will:  
High thought and brave,  
The rapture of a lover,  
The Vision gleaming from yon western hill.

Beyond my present sight  
There lies some sweet allure,  
Some crested glory waiting to be won;  
Shimmering in light,  
Beautiful and sure,  
Beckoning bright hands that call me on.

I know not where it lies,  
Nor whither I go, nor how  
The way is paved—with pleasure or with pain;  
But the search is in my eyes,  
And the dust upon my brow  
Shall turn to aureoled gold when I attain.

. . . . .

Oh, old old hope—  
Unfulfilled desire!

Pitiful the faith,  
Beautiful the fire!

Know, soul who criest,  
Thy gleaming from afar,  
Thy quest of wild adventure,  
Thy sweet far star

Shall be the bitter path  
To a high stern goal;  
So bow thy head  
To thine own soul.

### *BROWN SANDS*

My stallion impatiently  
Stamps at my side,  
Into the desert far  
We two shall ride.

Brown sands around us fly,  
Winds whistle free,  
The desert is sharing  
Gladness with me.

The madness of motion  
Is mine again.  
Forgotten forever  
Sorrow and pain.

Into the desert far  
Swiftly we flee,  
Knowing the passionate  
Joy of the free.

### *SEEKING*

SWIFT like the lark  
Out of the dark  
One cometh, singing;

Silent in flight  
Out of the night  
Answer is winging.

Forth to the dawn  
Leaps like a fawn  
A cry of high greeting,

Into the sun  
Two that have run  
Seeking, are meeting.

*MAY 11, 1915*

A PRAYER is forming on my tightened lips—  
Lord grant that I may keep my soul from hate!  
I have known love, I have been pitiful,  
Lord, I would keep my grief compassionate!

Pain-maddened cries I hear from out the sea,  
Upstaring at me, faces of the dead;  
Those silent bodies seem to call aloud,  
Those silent souls are still and comforted.

And we are here to bear the weight of pain—  
Oh, keep the poison from its awful task!  
Lord, let me be as they are ere I hate,  
Let me love on! this, this is what I ask!

However long the way, there is a turning,  
Somewhere beyond the storm there lies a land  
Where Peace abides, where love shall live again,  
And men shall greet with friendly outstretched hand

While little children laugh, and women weep  
With happiness—Oh, Lord, until that hour  
Keep Thou my hope, keep Thou my tenderness,  
Keep Thou my trust in Thy far-seeing power!

## *WATCHERS*

I WATCH the Eastern sky  
For a sign of dawn  
Long delayed.  
Such stillness is around  
That every separate sense  
Is twice-attuned, twice-powerful,  
And loneliness enwraps me like a sea  
Into whose unplumbed depths I must go down:  
A sea unsatisfied  
Where drifting shapes, wan-eyed,  
Reach forth wan arms  
Towards them who pause to look at their own souls  
Mirrored upon the sea.

Somewhere a loon  
Sends forth its weary cry across the dark.  
Oh, wailing bird, I know, I know!  
I think tonight the soul of the world is desolate  
And you and I its watchers.

Yet cease! oh cease!  
The night air quivers and resounds  
To bear your cry across the sleeping lake,

And I would have your silence  
While I make  
My own complaint.

For I would ask why we who have so little space  
To live and love and wonder  
Must go down into eternal mystery  
Alone:

And I would know  
Why, since that awful loneliness must be,  
We go about as strangers here on earth  
And meet and laugh and mock and part again  
With never a look into each others' eyes,  
With never a question of each others' pain.

So, even as I hear your melancholy plaint  
Across the sleeping lake,  
I send my questing cry across the world—  
And as I watch and listen,  
Through the stillness  
There comes to me an echoing and a far reverberation  
Of the many who have gone  
Into the limitless mystery,  
And thus they speak—

“We too have known your questing,  
We too have stretched our arms forth to the night  
And clasped its nothingness,  
We too have lived and loved and wondered  
For a little space

And then gone onward,  
And we seek across the silence  
To send our voices  
Out, out, across the dark."

Is it your voice I hear, oh far, strange bird,  
Or is it theirs—  
Theirs who have gone onward  
Alone and unafraid?  
Is there an answer I may sometime find,  
Or is it that our lips are dumb,  
Our eyes are blind,  
When love would come?

. . . . .

Now faint light comes upon the shadowy sky,  
The East is waking and the day begins.  
You send your cry across the quivering lake,  
I send my question out across the world,  
We watch, we two,  
Alone.

*TO MAURICE BROWNE*

*(On his creation of Capulchard in Cloyd Head's "Grotesques.")*

SHADOWS are round me as the dawn breaks,  
Shadows with long white swaying arms  
And anguished faces.  
I see them meet and touch and part  
Crying their desire,  
While a bitter figure moulds them  
In a shifting decoration  
Which enchants, eludes and maddens,  
Imprisoning my dreams.

Now they plead and droop and cower,  
Holding wan hands  
To whatever gods there be,  
Praying intercession  
From the malign enchantment  
Of their decorative doom  
Whence they weep their silent tears.

Oh, Draughtsman terrible  
Who puts out the moon and stars,  
Who smiles and waves a hand

And puppet hearts are broken,  
Let them love!  
Only a moment in a theater,  
Only a moment under the stars,  
All there may be before the end—  
Let them love!

. . . . .

The show is over.  
The swaying puppets of a little longer hour  
Go forth and cry out their desire  
To a Master of Decoration,—  
Their God unseen,  
And He, like you, smiles, puts forth a hand  
And blots the moon and stars  
And tears the glory from the earth and sky  
And cries:  
“Back to your places, fools!  
You shall not love!”

## *PRAYERS*

DAY by day I tread my appointed way  
Greeting the sun with dutiful intent,  
Seeing his slow decline into the West,  
Watching draw near my night of quietude.

Each day I see fade slowly back to join  
Those other days, unlive*d*, unloved, unmourned,  
That have passed by in grave processional  
With never a golden one to mark their passing.

Sometimes at night I ask the friendly stars  
"Tell me, what do I here? Why have I breath  
And this fair body in a world of shadows?  
Why do I live?"  
But the stars shine silently  
And make no answer.

Sometimes I ask of God,  
"Dear Lord, I love Thee well  
But Thou art far away—  
Couldst Thou not send to me  
Someone on earth to love?

And puppet hearts are broken,  
Let them love!  
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Only a moment under the stars,  
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"Dear Lord, I love Thee well  
But Thou art far away—  
Couldst Thou not send to me  
Someone on earth to love?"

So should I love Thee more."  
But God sends no one.

Sometimes I ask the far tumultuous sea,  
"Oh Sea, give me of your great beating heart!  
Let me be swept on the whirlwind,  
Let me be lulled and rocked,  
Let me be storm-tossed, made mad,  
Then— let me perish!"  
But the Sea roars on unheeding.

So day by day I tread my appointed way  
Greeting the sun with dutiful intent,  
Seeing his slow decline into the West,  
Watching draw near my night of quietude.

## *MY BOAT AND I*

My staunch little boat is tugging at its moorings  
Eager to be free,  
Eager to slip out on the great waters  
Beyond the returning tides,  
Out to the unknown sea.

My staunch little boat, unwilling prisoner,  
Frets and pulls at the anchor chain  
While the wind calls,  
"Come! come!  
I will bear you  
Out to the unknown sea!"

Long time my boat and I have plied the harbour  
On little busy journeyings intent,  
Long time with wistful gazing  
I have listened to the calling—  
The winds with buffeting caress,  
The waves with ceaseless urge—  
Calling "Rest, rest, rest,  
Rest on an unknown sea."

And now we are away  
Into the mystery.

Quietly the swaying waters  
Rock and beguile and soothe us  
That we may not know  
We are so far away.

Along the shore  
Are hands stretched out.  
What would you with me now,  
Oh pleading hands?  
I come not to you any more,  
I have set my sail  
Out to the unknown sea,  
Would you have me stay adventuring?  
Would you have me come again  
To be amidst you  
With alien eyes and a heart unquiet?

Oh cease your crying!  
I come not back.  
Long time my little boat and I  
Have fretted at the mooring,  
Long time we have looked out beyond the bar  
With a great questioning, and a great wonder,  
And then, an hour came which held the parting  
And we slipped  
Out, out, to the unknown sea.

. . . . .

The hands stretched out have faded from my sight,  
The shore is dim,

The mountains fade into the limitless blue,  
Only the wind and the sea companion me,  
Singing  
“Rest, rest, rest,  
Rest on an unknown sea.”

## *PICTURES*

I saw a little boy go hurrying  
Towards an old man nodding in the sun.  
He tweaked him by the sleeve  
And gazed at him with insistent frowning eyes  
Asking his question.  
The old man blinked and muttered  
And the child let go his sleeve  
And drooped and turned away.

. . . . .

I saw a mother counselling her daughter  
About her lover, and the girl was sullen,  
Looking from out averted eyes  
For means to go to him;  
And the mother bowed her head  
And turned away.

. . . . .

I saw two lovers meet with hungry arms,  
And kiss and speak and kiss again—  
Then speak with challenging tones and fall apart.  
I saw them turn with tightened lips made dumb

And eyes quick-quenched and dark.  
Slowly they went their ways.

. . . . .

I saw a woman kneeling in a church,  
Her head was bent upon worn hands  
Clasped tightly.  
Her dress was black and poor.  
After a time she rose and shook her head,  
Then beat her fist upon the rail  
And clattered noisily down the aisle.  
At the door she paused,  
Narrowed her eyes at the holy water  
And passed on.

### ***FORWARD, SINGING!***

**LISTEN**, girl, stand there near me,  
Give me your two fluttering hands,  
Then listen.

Little hurrying human beings  
Are important and significant  
Only in so far as they can stand alone.  
Most of them stand sideways,  
Propping themselves  
Against this brother or that brother  
Or this sister or that sister,  
Leaving each prop  
Only to carom swiftly to the next.

Now shall not every one of these  
Sometime discover  
If his prop fall down  
He falls as well?

Listen, beautiful child,  
I would carve my destiny alone!  
As a keen-eyed captain steers his ship  
By the light of the far north star  
Awake, alert, alone.

So, laughing girl  
Whom I call to my side,  
Hear!  
I stand by myself.  
I can love, aye, with a fierce flame,  
But I love none so much, no man, no woman,  
That his passing or his forgetfulness  
Shall undo me.  
I and my soul  
Stand beyond the need of comforting.  
None has power to make me  
Helpless, incomplete, beholden.

Now, bright child, golden girl,  
Warm woman with the fluttering hands  
Whom desire has brought,  
Will you come to my arms?  
I will give you love,  
No other lover can give you love like mine,  
Come!

Ah, that is well:  
Quick, your mouth,  
And then forward, singing!

But,—if you had not come,  
Laughing girl,  
I would have gone forward singing  
Alone!

### *BARBERRIES*

You say I touch the barberries  
As a lover his mistress?  
What a curious fancy!  
One must be delicate, you know,  
They have bitter thorns.  
You say my hand is hurt?  
Oh no, it was my breast,  
It was crushed and pressed—  
I mean—why yes, of course, of course—  
There is a bright drop, isn't there?  
Right on my finger,  
Just the color of a barberry,  
But it comes from my heart.

Do you love barberries?  
In the autumn  
When the sun's desire  
Touches them to a glory of crimson and gold?  
I love them best then.  
There is something splendid about them;  
They are not afraid  
Of being warm and glad and bold,  
They flush joyously

Like a cheek under a lover's kiss,  
They bleed cruelly  
Like a dagger wound in the breast,  
They flame up madly for their little hour,  
Knowing they must die—  
Do you love barberries?

## *TWO PATHS*

TODAY it seemed God bent to me and said,  
"Pilgrim, you are weary, are you unaware  
You have two paths?"  
And I answered, wondering,  
"Tell me of them that I may choose."  
And God said  
"You have set your face towards a far goal,  
To be attained  
Only with heartbreak of endeavor.  
It is written should you choose this path  
Many times you shall faint and falter,  
Raising yourself with bruised hands  
And bewildered eyes,  
And when at last  
You see the ending of the journey,  
Before eternal silence comes,  
You shall hear  
A little clamouring and tinkling of men's voices:  
But you will smile quietly  
And turn away."

"And the other path?" I asked.  
In a different voice God said,

"The other path is short,  
It ends but a little way ahead,  
There is no attainment, no acclaim;  
Only darkness, quiet,  
Rest from desire,  
And memory  
In the heart of the beloved."

And I answered,  
"I have chosen."

## *WHEN YOU COME*

(“There was a girl with him for a time. She took him to her room when he was desolate and warmed him and took care of him. One day he could not find her. For many weeks he walked constantly in that locality in search of her.”—From *Life of Francis Thompson*.)

WHEN you come tonight  
To our small room  
You will look and listen—  
I shall not be there.

You will cry out your dismay  
To the unheeding gods;  
You will wait and look and listen—  
I shall not be there.

There is a part of you I love  
More than your hands in mine at rest;  
There is a part of you I love  
More than your lips upon my breast.

There is a part of you I wound  
Even in my caress;  
There is a part of you withheld  
I may not possess.

There is a part of you I hate—  
Your need of me  
When you would be alone,  
Alone and free.

When you come tonight  
To our small room  
You will look and listen—  
I shall not be there.

## ***REST***

OFTEN I have listened curiously  
To the sound of a simple word  
All seemed to know,  
And wondered why I could not find  
Its meaning.

Often I have dreamed  
Of that great Nothingness,  
That Silence which shall come,  
And asked if that  
Were rest.

To the unquiet sea  
I have gone down  
Seeking companionship,  
Calling out to the beating waves  
"Do you too ask for rest?"

Of the wind and the rain  
Singing their requiem  
Over dead summer  
I have asked,  
"You will be quiet soon;  
Where do you find rest?"

To the white moon  
Sailing serenely  
I have said,  
"You are dim and old and cold;  
Have you found rest?"

To the eternal sun  
Uprising solemnly  
I have cried out,  
"And this new day you bring,  
Will it hold my rest?"

Once to my heart tumultuous  
There came a gleaming,  
A far prophecy that like a fairy benison descending  
Gave answer to my questioning—  
Strange message lit with wonderment—

"Deep in the city's labyrinthine heart  
There shall be moonlight for us and white song."  
So ran the words,  
And like a diapason of sweet sound  
Across the stillness,  
Echoing, profound,  
There crept the promise,—rest.

And then—you came.  
I turned to find your hand, your arms, your breast.  
Deep in the city's labyrinthine heart  
You held me close, at rest.

*MORITURUS TE SALUTO*

WHEN one goes hence  
By his own hand alone  
We look aside.  
In a hushed tone  
We say—"What pain has gone before  
The sudden end?"

But I shall go  
Because I know  
No longer can the earth  
Hold any other joy for me  
Like this.

One night we had together,  
Only one.  
In all the years  
For all my tears  
The gods have given me  
Only one night,  
And it is over.

Now I am glad to go  
Into the Silence.

I have breathed the heights.  
I should but know  
The level ways and paths  
Of little valleys,  
I will not, this should be.

So, Beloved,  
Remember  
It is because of happiness,  
Not sorrow,  
That I go.  
From the far coolness  
Of eternity  
I shall look out  
To the grave stars,  
Singing.

## ***FLASHLIGHTS***

THE winter dusk creeps up the Avenue  
With biting cold.  
Behind bright window panes  
In gauzy garments  
Waxen ladies smile  
As shirt-sleeved men  
Hustle them off their pedestals for the night.

Along the Avenue  
A girl comes hurrying,  
Holding her shawl.  
She stops to look in at the window.  
"Oh Gee!" she says, "look at the chiffon muff!"  
A whimpering dog  
Falters up to cringe against her skirt.

A man in his shirt sleeves lolls against a tree,  
His feet stick out,  
His hands lie on the grass, palms up.  
He stares ahead.  
Now and again he turns himself  
As from the enshrouding darkness forms emerge  
Dragging their feet, arms interlocked,  
Wan faces raised to the flare of light.  
Sometimes these kiss,  
Scream in brief laughter, or throw their bodies  
Prone on the welcoming earth.  
The man watches them, then turns his head,  
Gets himself upon his feet  
And walks away.

Candles toppling sideways in tomato cans  
Sputter and sizzle at head and foot.  
The gaudy patterns of a patch-work quilt  
Lie smooth and straight  
Save where upswelling over a silent shape.  
A man in high boots stirs something on a rusty stove  
Round and round and round,  
As a new cry like a bleating lamb's  
Pierces his brain.  
After a time the man busies himself  
With hammer and nails and rough-hewn lumber  
But fears to strike a blow.  
Outside the moonlight sleeps white upon the plain  
And the bark of a coyote shrills across the night.

A woman rocking, rocking, rocking,  
A small hand waving, nestling:  
Outside, lights blurred to starriness  
And summer rain.

. . . . .

Little waves slap softly and monotonously  
Against the pier:  
A triangle of geese honk by;  
On the darkening sand  
Fresh lines traced with a stick—  
“I am sorry, Forgive,”  
And a little oblong mound with a cross of twigs.  
Near by a girl’s hat and dainty scarf.

A smell of musk  
Comes to him pungently through the darkness.  
On the screen  
Scenes from foreign lands  
Released by the censor  
Shimmer in cool black and white  
Historic information.  
He shifts his seat sideways, sideways—  
A seeking hand creeps to another hand,  
And a leaping flame  
Illuminates the historic information.

Within the room, sounds of weeping  
Low and hushed:  
Without, a man, beautiful with the beauty  
Of young strength,  
Holds pitifully to the handle of the door.  
He hiccoughs and turns away  
While a hand organ plays  
"The hours I spend with thee, dear heart."

A pink feather atop of a greying white straw hat,  
A peek-a-boo waist and skirt showing a line of stocking  
Above white shoes,  
Stand in front of a judge  
Who leans over a desk of golden oak  
And summons forward a sulky, slouching boy.  
"You are required by this Court," says the judge,  
"To pay over to this woman  
One-third of your weekly wage  
For the support of your innocent child."  
And the clerk of the court calls out  
"Next on the docket?"

## *FLOODGATES*

### THE MAN

DEAR, try to understand.  
I wish that you could see,  
Now I am free  
Of all the fret and torment,  
The little daily miseries of love,  
That I can take you in my arms at night  
With a quick tenderness,  
With a new delight,  
Yet go my way untroubled if I do not find you,  
Forgetting in my zest for many things  
There is a you.

I wonder if you can ever understand?  
Do you not know  
That I would go  
Forth now to meet life's great adventuring  
Alone?

I would be unloosed from why and wherefore,  
I would not be stayed  
By sorrowing or rejoicing,

Even the enchantment of your nearness,  
Or your touch at night  
Is powerless any more  
To come between my loneliness and me.

They say that prisoners grow to love their chains,  
So now, after long years of bitter reaching out,  
Of crying to the winds  
And clasping only shadows of my dreaming,  
I love my torment.

We are such old companions,  
Loneliness and I!  
We have learned to ask but little of each other;  
There is no longer any turning away  
With hurt, averted eyes;  
So, Beloved,  
Let me keep my loneliness for friend,  
The only friend I trust.

When you and I first met  
And looked to each other's eyes  
Our swift desire,  
I gave with reckless hands  
My life into your keeping.  
Upon your eyes, your words, your body's grace  
I hung, poor fool, a-tremble;  
For you had power  
To blot the brightening day,  
To irradiate the night,

With your sweet hands  
To lift me to the mountains where the spirits danced  
Or drag me through a hell of furious pain.

And you would like to have that power again  
In your two hands?  
Oh no, my little one,  
No, my pretty one,  
Henceforward  
For all your sighing  
You shall but have my sudden, strong caresses,  
My tenderness, my love,  
But know  
That out, out, out I go  
Into the sun  
Alone.

#### THE WOMAN

So, Man of mine!  
I may henceforward ask  
Only your strong caresses?  
I am your little one,  
I am your pretty one,  
Even your Beloved, now that you are free  
Of little fret and torment.  
I may give you pleasuring,  
But no more pain.  
Is that your meaning?  
I would be clear at last.  
Oh Man of mine,

We are standing face to face,  
Now let there shine  
The search-light of our speech  
Across the night of silence.

Before us two  
There lie dim years for traversing,  
Behind, a mist  
Through which we long time groped  
With futile hands,  
And now, today, we meet.

Dear, do I not know  
That there were gleams across the darkness—  
Swift lightnings  
Towards which we onward pressed  
As, for an instant,  
Seeing our far quest  
Within our grasp?  
Perhaps these were your beckoning hands,  
Your dancing spirits on the mountain peaks,  
But not for long we saw them.  
And now today it seems  
That I must find  
What shall be done  
When you go out alone  
Into the sun.

I have so often watched your silent face,  
Your quiet mouth,  
Your smooth, white brow,

And longed for speech!  
I have so often wished to tell  
Of pent-up treasures in my breast  
You could not find!  
I would have given you such golden wealth  
Had you but come!  
Had you but said "I want your all."  
But you were dumb.

You went your ways silently  
And never asked my gift.  
Dear, day by day I lifted to your lips  
A chalice brimming with rich wine,  
And you but sipped a little and turned away,  
And the wine was spilled.

The years have passed:  
There may not be upgathering  
Of wasted days,  
As seasons flushed and waned  
We have sown and reaped and harvested.  
Now, what shall come?

I cannot go forth  
As you, into the Sun  
Alone,  
I cannot take  
My loneliness by the hand  
For chosen friend, as you.  
I am a woman and I want  
Not tenderness,

Not strong caresses only,  
But the soul of you,  
My Man.

#### THE MAN

Dear, give me your hands,  
Look into my eyes and tell me  
If you can find the soul of me.  
I think it has gone questing.  
Call it back!  
Recapture the wingèd thing,  
And I will give it gladly  
Into your keeping.  
But, dear heart, be fearful—  
Souls are delicate.  
What if mine died long since,  
What time it gave up seeking  
To find your own?  
Your eyes are wet, forgive!  
Let there be no more hurting,  
Joy there has been in our meeting.  
I would banish weeping.  
Let the still waters wash away pain  
Into the sea of forgetting.  
Still may we look into each other's eyes,  
Still answer to the senses' quick demand,  
But as the years have marked us in their passing  
So must we go onward—  
Hand in hand still,  
Yet alone.

## **CHLOROFORM**

*(Written in collaboration with Arthur Davison Ficks.)*

A SICKENING odour, treacherously sweet,  
Steals through my sense heavily.  
Above me leans an ominous shape,  
Fearful, white-robed, hooded and masked in white.  
The pits of his eyes  
Peer like the portholes of an armoured ship,  
Merciless, keen, inhuman, dark.  
The hands alone are of my kindred;  
Their slender strength, that soon shall press the knife  
Silver and red, now lingers slowly above me,  
The last links with my human world . . .

. . . The living daylight  
Clouds and thickens.  
Flashes of sudden clearness stream before me,—and then  
A menacing wave of darkness  
Swallows the glow with floods of vast and indeterminate grey.  
But in the flashes  
I see the white form towering,  
Dim, ominous,  
Like some apostate monk whose will unholy

Has renounced God; and now  
In this most awful secret laboratory  
Would wring from matter  
Its stark and appalling answer.  
At the gates of a bitter hell he stands, to wrest with eager  
fierceness  
More of that dark forbidden knowledge  
Wherefrom his soul draws fervor to deny.

The clouds have grown thicker; they sway around me  
Dizzying, terrible, gigantic; pressing in upon me  
Like a thousand monsters of the deep with formless arms.  
I cannot push them back, I cannot!  
From far, far off, a voice I knew long ago  
Sounds faintly thin and clear.  
Suddenly in a desperate rebellion I strive to answer,—  
I strive to call aloud,—  
But darkness chokes and overcomes me:  
None may hear my soundless cry.  
A depth abysmal opens,  
Receives, enfolds, engulfs me,—  
Wherein to sink at last seems blissful  
Even though to deeper pain. . . .

O respite and peace of deliverance!  
The silence  
Lies over me like a benediction.  
As in the earth's first pale creation-morn  
Among winds and waters holy  
I am borne as I longed to be borne.

I am adrift in the depths of an ocean grey  
Like seaweed, desiring solely  
To drift with the winds and waters; I sway  
Into their vast slow movements; all the shores  
Of being are laved by my tides.  
I am drawn out toward spaces wonderful and holy  
Where peace abides,  
And into golden æons far away.

But over me  
Where I swing slowly,  
Bodiless in the bodiless sea,  
Very far,  
Oh very far away,  
Glimmeringly  
Hangs a ghostly star  
Toward whose pure beam I must flow resistlessly.  
Well do I know its ray!  
It is the light beyond the worlds of space,  
By groping, sorrowing man yet never known—  
The goal where all men's blind and yearning desire  
Has vainly longed to go  
And has not gone:—  
Where Eternity has its blue-walled dwelling-place,  
And the crystal ether opens endlessly  
To all the recessed corners of the world,  
Like liquid fire  
Pouring a flood through the dimness revealingly;  
Where my soul shall behold, and in lightness of wonder rise  
higher

Out of the shadow that long ago  
Around me with mortality was furled.

I rise where have winds  
Of the night never flown;  
Shaken with rapture  
Is the vault of desire.  
The weakness that binds  
Like a shadow is gone.  
The bonds of my capture  
Are sundered with fire!

This is the hour  
When the wonders open!  
The lightning-winged spaces  
Through which I fly  
Accept me, a power  
Whose prisons are broken—

. . . . .  
. . . But the wonder wavers—  
The light goes out.  
I am in the void no more; changes are imminent.  
Time with a million beating wings  
Deafens the air in migratory flight  
Like the roar of seas—and is gone . . .  
And a silence  
Lasts deafeningly.  
In darkness and perfect silence  
I wander groping in my agony,

Far from the light lost in the upper ether—  
Unknown, unknowable, so nearly mine.  
And the ages pass by me,  
Thousands each instant, yet I feel them all  
To the last second of their dragging time.  
Thus have I striven always  
Since the world began.  
And when it dies I still must struggle . . .

. . . . .  
The voice I knew so long ago, like a muffled echo under  
the sea  
Is coming nearer.  
Strong hands  
Grip mine.  
And words whose tones are warm with some forgotten  
consolation,  
Some unintelligible hope,  
Drag me upward in horrible mercy;  
And the cold once-familiar daylight glares into my eyes.

He stands there,  
The white apostate monk,  
Speaking low lying words to soothe me.  
And I lift my voice out of its vales of agony  
And laugh in his face,  
Mocking him with astonishment of wonder.  
For he has denied;  
And I have come so near, so near to knowing. . . .

Then as his hand touches me gently, I am drawn up from  
the lonely abysses,  
And suffer him to lead me back into the green valleys of  
the living.

## *THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY*

WHERE are you, Dear?  
What is it that I hold—  
A shape, a phantom, who will not ease my pain?  
O Beloved! My beloved!  
What is it comes between our seeking arms?  
Lip to lip we press  
And breast to breast,  
Straining to overleap the barrier,  
And all the while we know  
We are apart.  
We know tomorrow we shall be  
More horribly  
Alone.

Do you remember  
When we first cried out each to each?  
How the valleys rang with laughter and gay words  
And eager promises?  
Do you remember how we told each other  
Pain was over,  
That nothing now could come  
We could not still with kisses?  
Do you remember those first days

When the world was lost in a dream and a forgetting  
And eternity was ours?

Then, as the years followed,  
Do you remember how we found  
That pain must be?  
How, heavy-hearted, we gazed bewildered  
Into each other's eyes,  
Asking, why?

One night you would not speak,  
And when I pressed you for your cause of silence  
You said "I tried to tell you once  
My heart's dim heaviness,  
But you are a man, you can never understand."  
And then I saw  
That we were far away from one another,  
For I had thought the same.

And after  
In a quick ache of sympathy  
We kissed and clung,  
And then you slept.  
I heard the little sobbing breaths  
Like a hurt child's  
Of a loneliness I had no power to soothe.  
We asked so much!  
We looked to each other as some look to God,  
And when God came not

And our lifted hands were empty  
We cried out that love was dead.

We have grown patient since  
And pitifully wise,  
We see how little may be given,  
And we are thankful  
Lest there be nothing.  
Yet even when I lay my wearied head  
Upon your knees and fall asleep  
To waken with your hand on my hot brow,  
Then, when I thank God, if there be a God,  
For you—  
We are apart.

Yesterday I watched you  
Protect the child against the winter cold.  
Warmly you wrapped him  
While his baby face laughed back at you  
From its frame of softest fur:  
I think a great hand comes and wraps us so,  
Each in his loneliness as in an enfolding garment,  
That we shall be ready  
To make our last great journeying  
Alone.

As the years go onward  
Little by little we turn  
And draw away from love's dominion,  
Little by little we loose the clinging hands

That hinder from adventuring,  
Oftener and more often  
We go apart  
To ask ourselves  
The inevitable question.  
The friends we seek are questioners  
Who strive, like us, to cross with thoughts  
The illimitable void:

Therefore, Dear, give over  
Trying to comfort,  
Give over the wish to yield me  
All I need—

Once long ago I lost myself in you,  
Once long ago I was but part of you,  
Bereft without you,  
Mad for lack of you,  
Now I am I,  
Preparing to go onward  
When the end shall come  
Alone.

### **III**

## **STORIES IN METRE**



## *THE PRISONER*

"WE had a prisoner once," the Warden said,  
"Who was no common man. I could not say  
To make it clear, where lay the difference,  
And yet, and yet,—something was there I know."

"Tell me of him," I said, drawing a chair,  
Knowing that in the old man's heart there lay  
Many a story.

"Willingly," he answered,  
"Yet when all's said, you'll know no more than I  
Why his words puzzle me; why, when I pass  
His cell, I always think that I can see  
His eyes, his following eyes, that seemed to ask  
Over and over again, some kind of question."

He thought a moment, then began his story  
As if by careful measuring of his words  
He tried to make me see what he found dim.

"You know the row of cells," he said, "they built  
To make the fourth row 'round the hollow square?  
They front the East, and so I put him there.

I'd hardly like to say what was the reason,—  
It seems so foolish; but, the day he came,  
Just as the big door opened, I had seen  
Him turn his head, and this is what he said:  
'And it is I,—I, who have loved the Dawn!  
A queer thing, wasn't it? I suppose he thought  
That he would never see it any more.

"It's strange how little things come back to you!  
I can remember when he saw his cell  
He bent his head, making a kind of greeting,  
Then quickly stepped across and glanced around:  
'And this is what I have to call my home'  
Was what he thought, I guess. It always seems  
To sicken me somehow, to show 'em in,  
The hopeful ones the most, I know so well  
How soon the eager look will disappear!"

"But tell me what he was in prison for?"  
I said, and met the old man's quick "What for?  
Oh well, there wasn't room enough outside.  
Why do you want to know? What does it matter?  
He was no common man. You'd think by now  
I'd stop my foolish bothering. I'm used  
Enough, God knows, to tangled human threads—  
Oh what's the use to try and tell it now?  
I'm such a fool! I can't go by his cell  
Without the wondering clutching at me here!"  
He laid his hand upon his breast; I thought  
His mind had dwelt too long with pain, and now

His fancies troubled him. "Mad then, perhaps?"  
I asked, and saw my blundering words had been  
Salt to a wound. He turned away and said  
"No, no, he was not that, not mad," and stepped  
Beside a shelf of little useless things  
Fumbling among them.

Presently he turned  
And placed within my hands a woman's picture.  
I took it silently, afraid to comment.  
"Think what you please," he said, "for I don't know,  
As no one came to take away his things  
I kept the picture. It was dear to him."

A gentle woman's face looked up at me;  
A tender face, lips parted, young grave eyes.  
I seemed to see within their depths a question,  
And turned to meet the old man's twisted smile.  
Nodding, he murmured, "So, you see it too?"  
Then took the picture from me and began  
Again, though haltingly, his troubled tale.

"At first he read and spoke and ate his food  
As if he thought he would not be here long  
And must be patient. Often he would ask  
What time it was, or if it rained or shone,  
Begging for outside news, and when I brought  
Letters or papers, seized them greedily  
And strained his eyes to get the contents quickly.  
Sometimes he'd hail me as I passed along

With such a flow of eager questioning talk,  
I wondered anyone so rich in words  
Could bear his solitude and not go mad  
With silence; but—our prison rules are stern.  
I shot the bolts that dulled that silver voice,  
And now I hear it echoing down the years.”

The old man rose and made a little pretence  
To put the picture back upon the shelf.

“Well, time went on,” seating himself, he said,  
“And as I made my rounds each day I thought  
The prisoner seemed to draw himself away.  
Not rudely; more as if he could not break  
The current of his thoughts, and up and down  
He’d walk; they all do that, but he as if  
He had some light inside his mind. Don’t think  
I’m crazy, but,—it’s hard to put in words.  
Sometimes I’d have my little try to break  
Across the distance. With a sudden smile  
He’d lay his hand upon me— ‘Yes, I know,  
I know,’ and so would push me to the door.  
I feared to go to him, and yet I loved  
The man as if he’d been my son. I knew  
The end was coming soon. My heart was sore,  
But I was powerless.

“One thing alone  
Could wean him from his strange expectancy,  
A little written word that came half-yearly.

I knew that it was due, and when it came  
I beat upon his door; I had the letter—  
Slowly he turned to meet me and I stopped,  
Seeing it was too late.

“Then from my hands  
He took the letter, lifting it silently,  
The way a priest lifts up the sacrament,  
Then gave it slowly back to me and said,  
‘Why bring me bread? So little, little bread?  
Why eke my life along so grudgingly?  
Take back the letter, I am far away,  
Keep back the bread and I shall sooner know.’  
And followed by his eyes, I left the cell  
And soon he died.

“No no, he was not mad,  
But only one to whom the Dawn was real.”

## *ELLIE*

SHE came to do my nails.  
Came in my door and stood before me waiting,  
A great big lummoX of a girl—  
A continent.  
Her dress was rusty black  
And scant,  
Her hat, a melancholy jumble of basement counter bargains.  
Her sullen eyes,  
Like a whipped animal's,  
Shone out between her silly bulging cheeks and puffy forehead.

She dropped her coat upon a chair  
And waited;  
Then, at a word, busied herself  
With files and delicate scissors,  
Sweet-smelling oils and my ten finger-tips.

She proved so deft and silent  
I bade her come again;  
And twice a week  
While summer dawned and flushed and waned  
She used me in her parasitic trade.

The dress grew rustier,  
The hat more melancholy,  
And Ellie fatter.

Each time she came I wondered as she worked  
If thought lay anywhere  
Behind that queer uncouthness.  
She had a trick of seizing with her eyes  
Each passing thing,  
An insatiate greediness for something out of reach;  
And yet she seemed enwrapped  
In a kind of solemn patience,  
Large, aloof and waiting.  
We hardly ever spoke—  
I could not think of anything worth saying;  
One does not chatter with a continent.  
Finally it was homing time;  
The seashore town was raw and desolate  
And idlers flitted.  
The last day Ellie came  
Her calm was gone, she had been crying.  
Fat people never ought to cry;  
It's awful. . . .  
The hot drops fell upon my hand  
While Ellie dropped the scissors suddenly  
And sniffed and blew and sobbed  
In disconcerting and unreserved abandonment.  
I said the usual things;  
I would have patted her but for the grease,  
But Ellie was not comforted.

Not until the storm was spent  
And only little catching breaths were left  
I got the reason.  
"I'm so fat," she gulped, "so awful, awful fat  
The boys won't look at me."  
And then it came, the stammered, passionate cry:  
Could I not help?  
Could I not find a medicine?  
We talked and talked  
And when at dusk she went, a teary smile  
Hovered a moment on her mouth  
And in those sullen, swollen eyes  
A little hope perhaps;  
I did not know.

The city and its interests soon engulfed me.  
A letter or two,  
A doctor's vague advice to bant and exercise,  
And Ellie and her woes passed from my mind  
Until, as summer dawned again,  
I heard that she was dead.  
A curious letter written stiffly,  
From Ellie's mother,  
Told me I was invited to the funeral  
"By wish of the Deceased."

Wondering I travelled to the little town  
Where the sea beat and groaned  
And sorrowed endlessly,  
And made my way down the steep street

To Ellie's door.  
Her mother met me in the hall  
And motioned,  
"She wanted you to see her,"  
Then ushered me into an awful place, the parlor—  
A place of emerald plush and golden oak  
Set round with pride and symmetry,  
And in the midst  
A black and silver coffin—  
Ellie's coffin.  
Raising the lid she pointed and I looked.

Somewhere in Florence Mino da Fiesole  
Has made a tomb  
Where deathless beauty lies with upturned face.  
Two gentle hands, palms meeting,  
Touch with their pointed forefingers  
A delicate chin, and over the vibrant body  
Clings a white robe  
Enshrouding chastely  
Warm curving lines of adolescent grace.  
No sleeper this,—  
The figure glows, alert, awake, aware,  
As if some sudden ecstasy had stolen life  
And held imprisoned there  
The moment of attainment  
Rapt, imperishable and fair.

Even so lay Ellie,  
And when from somewhere far I heard

The mother's voice  
I listened vacantly.

The woman chattered on,  
"The dress you know, white chiffon, like a wedding dress—  
I never knew she had it,  
She must 'a made it by herself.  
It's queer it fitted perfectly  
An' her all thin like that—  
She must 'a thought—"

Then black-robed relatives came streaming in  
To look at Ellie.  
I watched them start  
And glance around for explanation.  
The mother pinched my arm:  
"Don't ask me anything now," she whispered;  
"Come back tonight."

Then old, old words were sung and prayed and droned,  
While everybody dutifully cried,  
And when the village parson  
Rhythmically proclaimed,  
And this mortal shall put on immortality,—  
With a great welcoming  
And a great lightening  
I knew at last the ancient affirmation.

When evening came I found the mother  
Sitting amidst her golden oak and plush

In a kind of isolated stateliness.  
She led me in.  
“’Twas the stuff she took that did it,”  
She began; “I never knew till after she was dead.  
The bottles in the woodshed, hundreds of ’em  
All labelled ‘Caldwell’s Great Obesity Cure  
Warranted Safe and Rapid.’  
Oh ain’t it awful?” and she fell to crying miserably;  
“But wasn’t she real pretty in her coffin?”  
And then she cried again  
And clung to me.

## THE PARK BENCH

### A STRANGER, A MAN, A WOMAN

*The pallid night wind touched their burning cheeks  
With fetid breath, whispered a dim distress  
And flickered out; while whirling insects danced  
Their crazy steps with death around the light.*

### THE STRANGER

The night is hot and the crowds intolerable,  
May I sit here between you on this bench?

### THE MAN

I s'pose the bench is free to anybody.

### THE STRANGER

I've been walking up and down and wondering  
If I should speak. You sat here silently,  
You two. I could not tell what troubled you.

### THE WOMAN

I guess I was thinkin', Mister. I didn't know  
There was any other person anywhere near.

THE MAN

I don't know who she is. She's nothin' to me.  
She's got a kid there in her shawl, maybe  
Her trouble's there.

THE STRANGER

It's hard to keep up courage;  
The heat is sickening, it weighs you down.  
I'd like to see the child; may I see its face?

THE WOMAN

He's two weeks old today.

THE STRANGER

A sturdy youngster!  
What do you call him? What's his name, I mean?  
Don't turn away. I meant no harm, you know.

THE MAN

Didn't I tell you? Something's wrong, I guess. Maybe  
He's deserted, with another comin' on.  
Ask her again; likely she's needin' help.

THE STRANGER

You seem unhappy. Can't you tell me why?  
I'd like to help you if I can, because—

Well, once I had a little son like that.  
Come! what have you got to tell? Out with the story.  
See there, the boy is stretching out a hand,  
He knows a friend is somewhere 'round, eh, Sonny?

#### THE WOMAN

You'd like to know what I have got to tell?  
I guess you don't know what you're askin', Mister.  
You see that big house over there? You see  
This baby blinkin' here? Well, that's the house  
His father lives in. I just found it out,  
Found where it was, I mean, then I come here—  
Oh, what's the sense o' tellin' any more?  
That's all there is, I guess.

#### THE STRANGER

I'd like the story;  
Sometimes the pain is eased by speaking out.

#### THE WOMAN

I don't know why you want to know about me,  
It's no concern of yours, but if you'll promise  
You'll let him be, I'll tell you all there is.

#### THE STRANGER

You have my promise.

## THE WOMAN

More'n a year ago

It was, I seen him first, an' 'twasn't long  
Before I thought a lot and so did he.  
He said he'd take a flat and furnish it  
And we'd keep house together all alone.  
He said he had to travel, but he'd come  
As often as he could, and stay as long.  
I'd worked, you know; I never had a place  
I liked to live in, an' he let me buy  
A lot of things I wanted; then he'd laugh  
And say I liked the flat so much, perhaps  
He'd better stay away and not muss up  
The tidies on the chairs. He always had  
A lot of money. When he gave me some  
He'd never say how much it was, but just,  
"Here's more to buy the tidies with," and laugh.  
It wasn't long—that little time. I like  
To think about it, but it seems so far!  
Just like another city or a place  
That wasn't any more; I don't know why,  
I guess the flat's there still, if I should go—  
Hush, honey, hush—don't you be cryin' now.

I s'pose I'd ought to tell you that he said  
I mustn't have the kid. I didn't care;  
I didn't want it, neither. When I knew,  
I had to tell, because I got so sick.  
He didn't say a word to make me cry,

Not much of anything. He put a lot  
Of money in the drawer and went away—  
I never seen him since, until—today.  
Until—today—over there, this afternoon  
I seen him laughin' with another kid,  
And mine right here, right here, do you understand?

#### THE STRANGER

I think I understand, but please go on.

#### THE WOMAN

I told you he'd put money in the drawer;  
I hated takin' it; but o' course it lasted  
For quite a while,—until I had to go  
And be took care of at a hospital.  
At first I tried to find him, but I knew  
He didn't want me to. I thought perhaps  
When I could take the kid, he'd like it then.  
When I was packin' up I found a paper,  
A bill, I guess, all rumped, in a coat  
He left. It had a name I didn't know.  
At first I didn't think, but lyin' there  
All quiet in the hospital I saw  
It was his name, his truly name, and where  
He lived and all. This afternoon my time  
Was up—by rights I'd oughta left the ward  
Four days ago. They gave me this, for the food,  
Directions how to fix it right, you know,

And told me I could go, and so I came.  
I thought he'd surely want to see me now,  
When I was well again, just like I was.

I waited in the park and watched the house,  
It looked so big I couldn't ring the bell.  
Maybe 'twas six o'clock I saw him come;  
Just by the steps a baby carriage turned  
And waited for him comin' up the street.  
The woman wheelin' it called out "Look there!  
There's Daddy! Can't you throw a kiss to him?"  
I saw him lift the baby 'way up high,  
And carry it in the house. Then I come here.

#### THE STRANGER

I see. And that is all you plan to do?  
I mean, you won't go back?

#### THE WOMAN

What can I do?

You see, he doesn't want me any more.  
I'd like to die, but here's the kid! I guess  
I can't leave him. An' anyway I'm 'fraid  
To die alone. I don' know what I'll do.

#### THE MAN

I wish that I could think of anything  
To say that maybe'd help a little bit.  
May I just—shake your hand?—Excuse me, Mister.

**THE WOMAN**

I didn't know as you was listenin' too.

**THE MAN**

Perhaps you'd like to hear what's happened to me.  
You'll see that somebody has known the like  
Of what you're feelin', maybe it will help.

**THE STRANGER**

Ah! I was right then? Both of you are troubled?  
The night has brought us three together here;  
We must be friends. It's queer how loneliness  
Makes one reach one, as I have reached, to you.  
I think each one of us needs both the others.

**THE MAN**

Well, Mister, you don't look as if you'd need  
Our help, but maybe you do, maybe, who knows?  
I'll tell you what's been happening to me.  
I'm sick of thoughts goin' round and round and round,  
I wonder if anybody 'll ever know,  
I mean to understand, what I've been thinkin'.

**THE STRANGER**

Why don't you start? We'll try to understand.

### THE MAN

I'll tell you first that I'm a drinking man,  
And that's a thing that causes lots of trouble.  
She's not to blame, she stood it for a while.  
She had the children, there are two, you know,  
But I was pretty bad. I hated it,  
But there it was, and every day a fight,  
And oftener and oftener I'd lose.  
One day she went away and took the children.  
They served some papers on me; I was drunk  
And didn't care; but pretty soon I knew  
That she had gone for good. A lawyer came  
And talked to me, after she'd talked to him.  
And afterwards I saw her in the Court.  
The Judge said I must leave our house, and if,  
For two years, I could cut the liquor out  
She'd let me back.

And so I got a room  
About two blocks away where I could see  
The children as they passed along to school.  
Sometimes I'd walk a little way with them,  
But when I couldn't answer all their questions  
I'd think I'd better let 'em be, and so  
I'd only watch 'em from behind the blind.  
Well, Ma'am, I tried my best; I made a calendar  
To mark the days. I got a good promotion.  
The time went by, and all the while I thought  
Two years are only seven hundred days

And thirty over! I can stick it out!  
And then one day I'll dress myself up clean  
And meet the children and we'll go back home.  
I'd marked the calendar six hundred off  
And eighty-six, and forty-four were left.  
The heat came on and took the starch all out  
Of everything. I didn't care what happened.  
I thought she didn't mean to keep her promise—  
A week ago—oh, well, you know the rest.  
I don't know where I've been. I'd like to die,  
Only I've been so lonesome in that room.  
I seem to be afraid to die alone!

#### THE WOMAN

I'm awful sorry, Mister, awful sorry.  
Seems like tonight most everybody's luck  
Has all gone back on 'em. Thank you for tellin'!

#### THE STRANGER

There's no use sitting here in silence, is there?  
We've got to find some way to help you both.  
I'd like to if I can, but anyhow,  
We've helped each other just by speaking out.  
If you'll wait here I'll get a cab and take  
You and the baby to the Sisters' Home.  
Perhaps you'll come to my office in the morning;  
I'd like to talk to you; I'm sure we'll find  
There's something we can plan. Here is the address.

I sha'n't be long, keep talking so's to cheer her,  
It was a kindly thought of yours to tell  
Your story after hers. We'll find some way.

THE WOMAN

What 'ud he mean? About the Sisters' Home?

THE MAN

Some place where you an' the kid can go, I s'pose.

THE WOMAN

It's queer how everybody's good to you  
'Ceptin' the only one you want to be.

THE MAN

He said it wasn't any use to sit  
Here silent; that you'd better speak it out;  
It always helped. He said he'd find a way.  
Do you believe there's anything ahead  
For you or me? I wonder if there is.

THE WOMAN

I'm done with wonderin' long ago, I know!  
I want to die! God, how I want to die!  
But here's the kid, he didn't ask to come,  
And he's so little, what 'ud become of him?

THE MAN

Do you believe there's anything—over there?

THE WOMAN

There's rest.

THE MAN

I know there's rest, but when I've sat  
All by myself there in that little room  
Thinking things out, sometimes it seemed there must  
Be something more. I'd mighty well like to know.

THE WOMAN

If I could find someone to take the kid  
I'd like to rest, just rest, I wouldn't want  
Much of anything more. There isn't anything.  
I wish I wasn't scared to die alone.

THE MAN

You said that once before. Do you mean it, really?

THE WOMAN

What are you thinkin' about? Say it out, say it out!

**THE MAN**

What if we went together, you and I?  
There ain't any use of livin' any more.  
We'd find out something, anyhow.

**THE WOMAN**

You mean—

**THE MAN**

I mean I'm sick o' livin', so are you.  
Put the kid down there by the evergreens.  
He'll come and find it—he said he'd get a cab;  
He'll take it to the Sisters. Oh, I'm crazy!  
Don't put it there! Take it up again, I say!  
A little kid like that! Don't listen to me.

**THE WOMAN**

He's sleeping now; he'll never know what's happened.

**THE MAN**

You're goin' to? Well, come along then fast  
Or he'll come back. We're both of us crazy now,  
But what's the sense of livin' any more?  
Maybe there's something better—over there.

**THE WOMAN**

Wait till I fix him comfortable. Say, Mister,  
I was lookin' at the river, by the pier,  
Only I was afraid. Will you stay beside me?

**THE MAN**

Yes, that's the place, come quickly, 'twon't take long.

**THE WOMAN**

Maybe we could find a piece of iron  
Or something heavy, so's they wouldn't find us;  
There's lots around the pier.

**THE MAN**

I'll tell you what:  
I'll tie our hands together to the iron  
So the waves won't—

## ***THE SISTERS***

WE four  
Live here together  
My three old sisters and I  
In a white cottage  
With flowers on each side of the path up to the door.  
It is here we eat together,  
At eight, one, and seven,  
All the year round,  
It is here we sew together  
On garments for the Church sewing society  
Here,—behind our fresh white dimity curtains  
That I'll soon have to do up and darn again.  
It is this cottage we mean  
When we use the word Home.  
Is it not here we lie down and sleep  
Each night all near together?

We never meet  
My three old sisters and I.  
We never look into each others' eyes  
We never look into each others' souls,  
Or if we do for a moment  
We quickly begin to talk about the jam

How much sugar to put in and when.  
We run away and hide, like mice before the light;  
We are afraid to look into each others' souls  
So we keep on sewing, sewing.

My three old sisters are old  
Very old.  
It is not such a great while since they were born  
Yet they are old.  
I think it is because they will not look and see.  
I am not old  
But pretty soon I will be.  
I was thinking of that when I went to him  
Where he was waiting.

My sisters had been talking together all the long afternoon  
While I sat sewing and silent,  
Clacking, clacking away while the lilac scent came in at the  
window  
And the branches beckoned and sighed.  
This is what they said—  
“How did that paper come into our house?”  
“Fit to be burnt, don't you think?”  
Then the third, “It's a shameless sheet  
To print such a sensual thing.”  
The paper lay on the table there, between my three sisters  
With my poem in it,—  
My little happy poem without any name.  
I had been with him when I wrote it and I wanted him again.  
The words arose in my heart clamouring for birth—

And there they were, between my three sisters.  
Each read it in turn  
Holding the paper far off with the tips of her fingers.  
Then they hustled it into the fire  
Giving it an extra poke with the tongs, a vicious poke.  
Then each sister settled back to her sewing  
With a satisfied air.  
I looked at them and I wondered.  
I looked at each one,  
And I went to him that night—  
Where he was waiting.

My three old sisters are dying  
Though they do not know it.  
They are not dying serenely  
After life is over,  
They are just getting dryer and dryer  
And sharper and sharper;  
Soon there will not be any more of them at all.

I am not like them  
I cannot be  
For I have a reason for living.  
While they were picking their little pale odourless blossoms  
I gathered my great red flower  
And oh I am glad, glad,  
For now when the time comes I can die serenely,  
I can die after living.

But first what is to come?  
I am going to give my three old sisters a shock  
Then what a rumpus there will be!  
They will upbraid and reproach  
And then they will whisper to each other, nodding slowly  
and sadly  
Telling each other it is not theirs to judge.  
So they will become kind and pitiful  
Affirming that I am their sister  
And that they will stick by and see me through.  
But underneath they will be touching me with the lifted  
tips of their fingers.  
They would like to hustle me into the fire  
With an extra poke of the tongs.

Perhaps I will pretend to hang my head,  
Perhaps I will to please them,  
I am very obliging—  
But in my heart I shall be laughing with a great laughter,  
A great exaltation.

Yes they will upbraid and reproach  
In grave and sisterly accents  
And mourn over me,  
One who has fallen;  
Yet I suspect  
As each one goes to her cold little room,  
Deep in her breast she will envy  
With a terrible envy  
The child that is mine

And the night  
The incredible night  
When the sun and the moon and the stars  
Bent down  
And gave me their secrets.

## ***REASON***

DOCTOR! Doctor! I want you to come in.  
Doctor! Don't you hear me? Don't go by!  
That's right, come in here now and shut the door.  
Sit down there in that chair  
And listen.  
Don't sit there with that silly smile all over you.  
I'm going to make you listen.

You know when I first came they wanted me to talk.  
I could see them trying, with little tricks and questions.  
Well, now I will,—  
I'll tell you if you'll let me out.  
Will you, Doctor? Will you?  
Those bars there at the window make me sick,  
And the screaming all around.  
You have to holler too, to keep from hearing!  
The nurse said I'd be in the padded room  
If I kept on—  
Say, Doctor, will you let me out  
After I've told you everything there is?  
Will you? Will you? Will you?

Oh very well,  
You can open the door then now.

I don't want you any more; I'll never tell—  
Say, Doctor, don't go yet awhile;  
Turn round, don't go, I want to talk to you.  
There, please sit down again, I'll promise not to holler.  
I'll tell you all about it and then you'll see—  
You'll let me go, I know you will.  
I tell you I've got to go and find 'em,  
Find 'em all—Father and Grandfather,  
All that made me go back home,  
That made me do it—  
But you don't know,  
I'll have to find some place to start at.

The first night that he tried to get at me, and he like that,  
I cried,  
Soon as he saw me crying he went off  
And got a quilt  
And made a bed out in the sitting-room.  
He got up early so I didn't see him.  
I thought all day,  
And I kissed him when he came at supper time.

That night he seemed just like he was at first,  
I mean when we were married first,  
I thought he wouldn't do it ever again—  
Say, Doctor, don't you tell,  
But somebody came when I was out  
And fixed his food up so's he'd want the stuff,  
I know who it was, but I won't tell,  
Not till I'm out of here.

She did it out of spite, I know, I know—  
Doctor, who is that hollerin'? Make her stop—  
I guess you'd think it "mattered" some  
If you heard it all the time—  
Well, finally I couldn't keep him in the sitting-room,  
I had to let him in, he hammered so,  
And then— Oh, Doctor, stop her please!  
I don't see what she's hollerin' for,  
Nobody got in her bed reeling drunk—  
I couldn't help him coming—I couldn't, an' I tried!

Next day I went around and did the dishes up,  
And cooked the dinner ready, and all the time I thought  
"Supposing it's happened—what'll the child be then?  
What'll I have to bring into the world?  
Supposing it's happened—"

Perhaps it was nearly supper time,  
I don't know clearly,  
But I couldn't stay, I couldn't!  
I left a letter for him and went home.  
I walked around the corner of the house and there they were  
Sitting at supper, Father and Grandfather  
And Ma and little Ben.  
I stood and looked at them.  
It seemed such a little while since I was sitting there  
Not thinkin' anything,  
Finally I went in and said  
"I've come home,—I've come away from Jim, I mean.

Don't everybody look at me like that—  
I tell you I've come home."

Then Ma got up and took me in her room  
And fixed the bed for me—  
She said we'd talk it over in the morning.

I stayed pretty near two months at home,  
And all the while Father and Grandfather  
And even little Ben  
Were at me to go back,  
Father kept saying all he wanted was my happiness.  
And then they got the clergyman  
And he talked just the same.  
And then Jim came.  
They all were nice to him and Jim was dreadfully sorry.  
He hadn't had a drop, he said, and if I'd come  
He'd never touch a single thing again—  
Oh, Doctor, make her stop!  
Go make her stop, I say, what's she got to holler for?  
Don't forget you promised if I'd tell  
You'd let me out—  
Do you want to hear the rest?  
I'm telling you straight enough, more'n I told the family—  
I never told them anything,  
I mean what I thought might happen,  
And nobody ever had the sense to guess  
What I was afraid of,  
Nobody but Ma,

And after the first she didn't do anything but cry  
And say Father knew best.

The second time Jim came, I said I'd go,  
I was so tired of everybody talkin' at me—  
Oh I don't want to tell you any more—  
I'm crazy with her hollerin'.  
You know the rest—I squeezed his eyes out—  
'Cause he was lookin' at me  
When I let him in—after his hammerin'—  
Then they brought me here—

Doctor, I've told you everything.  
Doctor, let me out!  
Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!

## *HER SECRET*

My secret and I stand here in front of the glass.  
We are bedecking ourselves for an evening of gayety.  
We look down and make our lips smile—  
We look up and make ourselves laugh,  
And then we turn and look into the glass again  
To see if others will believe that our eyes are smiling too.

How long will it last, the evening?  
It will be three hours at least, maybe four.  
There will be music and bright dresses and clinking and  
chattering  
And everybody will laugh; there will be a great deal of  
laughter.  
Everybody will go about with smiling lips,  
But if you stop and look  
You will see that everybody's eyes are hungry.

None of them shall know my secret  
No one knows that—  
Not any one in all the world.

There was one other knew  
But he is dead.  
I heard that he was dead just now—

A little while ago—  
Just a few minutes ago by the clock.  
I was putting on my beautiful dress  
When I heard a list read out from the paper, many names,  
A long, long list.  
I went on fastening my embroidered slippers  
While they read and read—  
It came while I was buttoning my gloves, my long gloves;  
There are a number of buttons.  
No one shall guess my secret.

There is a woman somewhere,  
I do not know where she is;  
But all her friends are hastening,  
Coming from all about  
To surround her with their melancholy faces.

Soon they will get for her a black dress and a long black veil.  
They will lead her faltering to a church,  
Her two wondering children held to her side, one by each  
hand.

She will be very important.  
They will say beautiful things about him—  
Beautiful sad things—  
And all the time, hid by her long black veil,  
Her eyes will be smiling—smiling.

And what have I of him?  
What shall I take with me to the party?  
Only the memory of that last dawn  
When I gave him all and bade him go.

## ***A LITTLE GIRL***

### **I**

I SEE a little girl sitting bent over  
On a white stone door-step.  
In the street are other children running about;  
The shadows of the waving trees flicker on their white dresses.

Some one opens the door of the house  
And speaks to the child on the steps.  
She looks up and asks an eager question.  
The figure shakes her head and shuts the door.  
The child covers up her face  
To hide her tears.

## II

Three children are playing in a garden—  
Two boys and an awe-struck little girl;  
They have plastered the summer-house with clay,  
Making it an unlovely object.

A grown-up person comes along the path.  
The little girl runs to her and stops,  
Asking the same question—"Where is my Mother?"  
The grown-up person does not make any answer.  
She looks at the summer-house and passes along the path.

The little girl goes slowly into the house  
And climbs the stairs.

### III

The little girl is alone in the garden.  
A white-haired lady of whom she is afraid  
Comes to find her and tell her a joyful thing.

The little girl runs to the nursery.  
The young nurse is doing her hair in front of the glass.  
The little girl sees how white her neck is  
And her uplifted arms.

Tomorrow they will be gone—they will not be here—  
They are going to find—Her.  
The young nurse turns and smiles  
And takes the little girl in her arms.

#### IV

The little girl is travelling on a railway train,  
Everything rushes by very fast,—  
Houses, and children in front of them,  
Children who are just staying at home.

The train cannot go fast enough,  
The little girl is saying over and over again,  
“My Mother—My onliest Mother—  
I am coming to you, coming very fast.”

## V

The little girl looks up at a great red building  
With a great doorway.  
It opens and the little girl is led in,  
Looking all about her.  
A Lady in a white dress and white cap comes.

After a long time  
A man in a black coat comes in.  
He says "She is not well enough, I am afraid."  
The little girl is led away.  
She always remembers the words  
The man in the black coat said.

## VI

The little girl is waiting in the big hallway,  
In the house of the white-haired lady.  
At the end of the path she can see the summer-house  
With its queer grey cover.

The hall clock ticks very slowly.  
The hands must go all around again  
Before the mother will come.

Now it is night.  
The little girl is lying in her bed.  
There is a piano going somewhere downstairs.  
She is telling herself a story and waiting.  
Soon She will come in at the door.

There will be a swift shaft of light  
Across the floor.  
And She will come in with a rustling sound.  
She will lie down on the bed  
And the little girl will stroke her dress and crinkle it  
To make the sound again.

Pretty soon the mother will step slowly and softly to the door,

And quietly turn the handle.  
The little girl will speak and stop her,  
Asking something she has asked many times before,—“My  
Father?”  
But the mother has never anything to answer.

## VII

The mother and the little girl are sitting together sewing.  
Outside there is snow.  
A woman with a big white apron  
Comes to the door of the room and speaks.

The mother drops her work on the floor  
And runs down the stairs.  
The little girl stands at the head of the stairs  
And cries out "My Father!" but no one hears.  
They pass along the hall—

The little girl creeps down the stairs,  
But the door is closed.

## VIII

The little girl is held and rocked,  
Held so tightly it hurts her.  
She moves herself free.

Then quickly she puts her face up close,  
And there is a taste of salt on her tongue.

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## IX

In a bed in an upper chamber,  
A bed with high curtains,  
A woman sits bowed over.  
Her hair streams over her shoulders,  
Her arms are about two children.

The older one is trying to say comforting things,  
The little girl wants to slip away,—  
There are so many people at the foot of the bed—

Out of the window, across the yellow river  
There are houses climbing up the hillside.  
The little girl wonders if anything like this  
Is happening in any of those houses.

## X

Many children and grown-up people  
Are standing behind their chairs around a bright table  
Waiting for the youngest child to say grace.

It is very troublesome for the youngest child  
To get the big words out properly.  
The little girl interrupts and says the grace quickly.

The white-haired lady of whom the little girl is afraid  
Is angry.  
The little girl breaks away and runs  
To the room of the bed with the high curtains.

She rushes in—  
The room is empty.  
She comes back to the table,  
But she does not dare to ask the question.  
She remembers the great red building  
With the great doorway.

## XI

The little girl is trying to read a fairy story.  
There is nobody in the garden.  
There is nobody in the house but the white-haired lady.

Someone comes to tell her her father is there—  
She does not want to see him,  
She is afraid.

## XII

The front door is open.  
There is rain, leaves are whirling about.  
A carriage with two horses  
And a coachman high up, holding a long whip,  
Stands waiting in front of the door.

The little girl is holding onto the banisters.  
They take away her hands from the banisters  
And lead her to the carriage in front of the door.  
Someone gets in behind her,  
The carriage door is shut,  
The little girl draws herself to the far corner.  
They drive away.  
The little girl looks back out of the window.

### XIII

The little girl is in a strange house  
Where there are young men called uncles  
Who talk to her and laugh.  
A large lady sits by the table and knits and smiles,  
In her basket are different coloured balls of wool,  
Pretty colours, but not enough to make a pattern.  
There is a curly soft little black dog  
That hides under the table.  
The uncles pull him out,  
And he tries to hold onto the carpet with his claws.  
The little girl laughs—  
But at the sound she turns away  
And goes up to her room and shuts the door.  
Pretty soon the large lady comes to her  
And takes her on her lap and rocks and sings.

. . . . .

#### **XIV**

The little girl has grown taller,  
She is fair and sweet and ready for love,  
But over her is a great fear  
As she remembers her mother's weeping.

**THE END**

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**This book is under no circumstances to be  
taken from the Building**

[illegible]



